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From: F.A. Harris
POL
AmEmbassy
Buenos Aires

XGDS-1/

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

June 12, 1978

Return to RN

SUBJECT: Navy Anti-Subversive Campaign

PARTICIPANTS: A Senior Rear Admiral in the Argentine Navy

Captain Paul Barrish, Naval Attache,
Amembassy Buenos Aires

F. Allen Harris, Political Officer,
Amembassy Buenos Aires

PLACE: Buenos Aires Restaurant

cc: Steve
Osman,
Dan Tice,
This indicates
existence of
prisoners beyond
those admitted by
Government, confirm
use of torture, summary
execution, detention
without charge.

Control Over Anti-Subversive Operations

Triggered by a comment from Capt. Barrish regarding the United States' retraining effort of its returning Viet-Nam veterans, the Admiral launched into an extended conversation regarding the Argentine Navy's anti-subversive operations. The Admiral noted there were three centers for Navy operations within the greater Buenos Aires area -- the Navy Headquarters, the Navy Mechanical School and the Coast Guard Headquarters. He emphasized that there had been over a 50 percent cutback in the number of operations conducted from the Coast Guard Headquarters. The Admiral noted that he had two major concerns regarding the personnel involved in anti-subversive activities. His first concern was related to identifying those persons who did not have the temperament for this difficult assignment. He noted that these people were generally identified by increased use of sick leave. He said that as soon as any changes in a person's pattern of sick leave were noted, they were immediately reassigned to other duties. He then commented that the second and more difficult problem was to spot over zealous officers. He said that a number of Navy personnel had become so dedicated to their anti-subversive activities that serious control problems developed. Normally this resulted in the unauthorized carrying out of an operation which had been rejected at higher levels. The Admiral emphasized that a clear signal had been sent to all counter-subversive operational personnel that persons found carrying out unauthorized operations would be severely treated. The Admiral mentioned, as an example, that persons who developed plans for five or six

ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)

U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPS

Margaret P. Grafeld, Director

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Exemption(s):

Declassify: ☐ In Part ☒ In Full

☐ Classify as ☐ Extend as ☐ Downgrade to

Date Declassify on Reason

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operations and were authorized to run only two or three, but in fact carried out the total number planned, were given the same summary justice for their excesses as are the terrorists.

The Admiral commented about the necessity of placing Navy officials through response retraining. He said the Navy was conducting retraining operations for its personnel who had been engaged in anti-subversive operations in order to better prepare them for their return to normal Navy responsibilities. Retraining and reassignment of overly aggressive Navy personnel coming out of anti-subversive activities constituted a major Navy concern at present. Persons in this category were generally assigned to training slots or to assignments abroad.

In response to a question regarding a dispute between Col. Roaldes, who leads the Army First Corps' Buenos Aires anti-subversive operations and Rear Admiral Chamorro who heads the Navy anti-subversive operations at the Navy Mechanical School, the Admiral said that it was inaccurate to describe the matter as a fight. He characterized Col. Roaldes as a fine man with responsibility for a very difficult job and one who discharges his duties with great professionalism. The Admiral continued that there had been discussions between Roaldes and Chamorro about a request from Col. Roaldes to include First Army Corps operatives in each mission run by the Navy in greater Buenos Aires area. Chamorro was willing to accept the assignment of Army personnel to the Navy Mechanical School operations unit on the condition that persons so assigned would be under the complete authority of the Navy and would not report independently to the First Corps. According to the Admiral, that proposal was unacceptable to Roaldes and the final result was an improvement in information coordination between Navy and Army operational units.

The Admiral commented that there was good cooperation between the various anti-subversive units in the Federal Capital. He noted that "free zones" had been completely eliminated in the fall of 1976. Consequently, the First Corps knew of all operations of conducted by the Navy outside of the Navy's geographic areas of responsibility as the Naval units had to request operational clearances for their vehicles and personnel.

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The Admiral mentioned that the wider dissemination of information regarding operations had in fact led to abuses in the form of theft and extortion by "bandas" of federal and provincial police agents. He cited the following example: The Navy plans to conduct an operation at a particular address in Belgrano. It informs the First Corps that an operation will be conducted at a certain hour by specified number of men in a described set of vehicles. This information is then transmitted to the local police station where it is picked up by a member of these gangs. The illegal "bandas" then go to the site of the operation and spot the exact house or apartment. As soon as the operation is completed by the authorized unit, members of the "banda" posing as operatives enter the house or apartment and confiscate property and money for their personal gain. The Admiral emphasized that Col. Roaldes was one of those persons within the military most strongly opposing "booty operations." He emphasized the taking of "booty" is not part of the anti-subversive operational doctrine.

The Admiral commented briefly about the summary adjudications (juicio sumario). The Admiral noted that in every disappearance case which is presented to him or to the Embassy, the "disappeareds" are characterized as "angels". He related a story regarding the children of a Naval officer who had disappeared. He had made a special effort to find out the circumstances regarding their disappearances. He discovered that the boy and the girl were involved in Montonero supply and propaganda operations respectively. Their parents had no knowledge whatsoever of the degree to which the children were involved with the Montonero organization. He said that such cases were typical. One could not blame the parents' strong reaction over the loss of their children but he knew that a fair summary trial was conducted in each case and that only those persons "disappeared" who were involved in terrorist activities or who were active subversive supporters of the terrorists and were deemed to be "irrecuperable".

The Admiral stated that the Navy had instituted a change in its anti-subversive procedures. He stated categorically that the Navy no longer would be responsible for any "disappearances" (in the sense of unexplained deaths). Persons "detained" in operations conducted by Navy units would either be turned over to the justice system for criminal trial or for executive detention under the PEN or they would be acknowledged as killed in combat" (i.e. executed). The Admiral said that he personally

realized that the government's disappearance policy had long term problems due to the family uncertainties it created. He predicted that when the Navy and Army agree on new procedures on counter-subversive activities, there would be no delay in implementing the revised procedures.

The Admiral emphatically denied the rumor that the Navy Mechanical School is a concentration camp. He said that it is the Headquarters of Navy Intelligence and that people have been held there only for questioning.

The Admiral acknowledged that the Navy was pushing actively for the Armed Forces to acknowledge those killed in battle. He noted that the government's information was incomplete and there was not information on many of the persons reported as having disappeared. He also pointed out that at the conclusion of any war, a complete list of those killed in battle is impossible to produce. He remarked that a small number of the persons who have been reported as disappeared are in fact government double agents posing as Montoneros who have been reported as disappeared. He emphasized again that many of the names on the various lists of disappeared persons are simply unknown to the government.

The Admiral mentioned the Navy's efforts to have the three Services recognize the nonrecognized ("DAM") prisoners and to proceed with the adjudication of those persons held at the disposal of the executive power. He had no comment about how many "DAMS" there were at present.

In commenting about the security forces' summary trials, the Admiral stated that the standard used was whether the individuals were Marxists involved in politics or Marxists involved in terrorism. If the persons were in the latter category, they would be judged as "irrecuperable". He claimed that the government had no intention of going after the members of the Argentine Communist Party who were not involved in terrorism but merely espoused Communist ideas. He mentioned, as an example, an operation which was conducted last year by the Coast Guard against a Montonero column composed of two cells. Of the persons captured, sixteen were turned over to the justice system as it was decided that these individuals were "small fry" ("perejil" - parsley).

The Admiral stated that he was placing more emphasis on two counterintelligence targets -- first, identifying those Navy operatives who were too aggressive and secondly, identifying Marxist infiltration within his Command itself.

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The Malvinas Dispute

The Admiral stated that the British handling of the Malvinas negotiations demonstrated that they were clearly interested in reserving the economic resources of the islands and the adjacent water for themselves. He contrasted the British rapid turnover of its former colonial empire with their reluctance to withdraw from the Malvinas. He noted that the major possibility of confrontation with the British existed over British or European Community ship fishing off the Malvinas Islands in waters regarded as Argentine. He said that this was the likeliest potential cause of confrontations with the British stemming from the Malvinas problem.

Aja Espil

The Admiral noted in passing that President Videla was annoyed that Aja Espil did not provide the GOA advance notice regarding Secretary Newsom's recent visit to Buenos Aires. The Admiral commented that Videla, after learning of the visit, called Montes and informed him of Newsom's pending arrival. This event did not make Aja Espil look well in either the President's or Montes' eyes.

Comments

The efforts described above by the Navy to ensure better control over its countersubversive operations have also been noted in the other Services. Navy control all along has been better than that of the Army, the Federal Security Service and other security organizations.

If true that some anti-subversive operatives have been summarily executed for having committed unauthorized abuses, we believe that such instances have been rare.

The technique of no more disappearances that the Admiral announced is in fact not new. There have been many mock combat incidents staged in the past by security forces to justify the killing of detained subversives. It should also be noted that the Admiral's comments about a "new" policy do not signify an end to disappearances. The result of the policy described by the Admiral, if implemented by all the Services, will be that detainees will be held incommunicado for interrogation but will be eventually accounted for in one way or another.

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We believe the Admiral is correct in his assertion that the Armed Forces do not have complete lists of all those killed in the counterterrorist campaign and therefore cannot account for all the "disappeared". According to a well-placed security source, the Armed Forces are preparing a list of terrorists killed in the countersubversive campaign which eventually will be published by the government. (Navy sources have taken credit for this initiative which has been discussed in Junta meetings.)

According to a security source, there are about 500 unrecognized prisoners being held in temporary detention centers around the country in addition to the 3300 official PEN prisoners.

In view of the recent policy statements about the need to continue the war against "ideological subversion" -- the latest such pronouncement having been issued by Air Force Brigadier Agosti in the name of the Junta on July 7 -- we believe that the possibility of the government turning against the Communist Party here is, at least, an open question.

(Note: This conversation is also being reported in part by Defense Attaches' Office - See IR 6804037578.)

cc: AMB/CHARGE
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POL/R
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ARA/ECA - Mr. Bumpus
HA/HR - Ms. Cohen
ARA - Mr. Lister
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Clearances:
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[REDACTED] XGDS-1 [REDACTED]

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